The Enigma of Adam Lanza's Mind and Motivations for Murder

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Former college or university students have been responsible for some of the most destructive shooting sprees in recent years. While Lanza did not carry out his attack on a college campus, he certainly could have. For campus Behavioral Intervention Team members, exploring Lanza's motivations could help better address students who may pose a threat of similar violence.

Adam Lanza did not attack a college campus, but he could have. He had attended both Western Connecticut State University and Norwalk Community College. Similarly, other rampage shooters, such as Jared Loughner (Tucson, Arizona; 2011), James Holmes (Aurora, Colorado; 2012), and Elliot Rodger (University of California at Santa Barbara; 2014), had been students at postsecondary institutions not long before carrying out their attacks. Thus, former college or university students have committed several of the worst rampage attacks in recent years. Why these perpetrators chose the venues they did, rather than their former schools, remains a mystery.

Despite the overwhelming attention generated by Lanza's attack, his mental dynamics remain elusive. This article is an attempt to shed light on who he was and what his motivations for violence might have been. Due to the limited available information, much of what follows constitutes questions and speculations rather than conclusions about why he chose to kill his mother and young children.

Though originally Lanza was said to have left no Internet footprint, this has turned out to be incorrect. Reed Coleman has conducted exhaustive research and concluded that Lanza edited *Wikipedia,* posted on YouTube, and contributed frequently to a forum called "Shocked Beyond Belief" that focused on mass murderers. Coleman has written multiple in-depth articles documenting the content of Lanza's postings and presenting evidence that the posts were indeed by Adam Lanza (see Coleman's blog, *Sandy Hook Lighthouse*; relevant articles will be cited when appropriate).

Because most of the postings were for a public audience rather than entries in a private diary, they cannot necessarily be taken at face value. They may express how Lanza wanted to be perceived rather than presenting who he really was, or they may have been meant sarcastically or humorously. Nonetheless, many of his posts seem meaningful and will be quoted for the possible insight they offer into his mind.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPE: PSYCHOTIC

I have elsewhere presented a typology of school shooters, placing perpetrators into one or two of three categories: psychopathic, psychotic, or traumatized (Langman, 2009; Langman, 2015). Though Lanza was not diagnosed as psychotic during his lifetime, in an earlier work (Langman, 2015), I speculated that he had undiagnosed schizophrenia. At the time, there was no clear evidence of hallucinations or delusions. Since then, however, more information has come to light that supports this diagnosis.

The hypothesis that Lanza was schizophrenic originally was based on several behaviors and traits he exhibited that are associated with schizophrenia. These include the lack of expressed emotion (flat affect) and the failure to speak in situations where speech would be appropriate and expected (poverty of speech).

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A former classmate stated, “If you looked at him, you couldn’t see any emotions going through his head” (Halbfinger, 2012). The woman who cut Lanza’s hair commented, “He would just sit there and not speak … I just thought the child couldn’t speak” (Murphy, 2012).

In addition, Lanza’s reported periods of withdrawal and unresponsiveness could have been catatonic episodes. For example:

> He began having episodes that sent him into complete withdrawal. Loud noises, bright lights, or any sudden change or excitement could send him into a nonresponsive state … “It was like he would go into a trance,” one student remembered. “It was a little scary … He just seemed vacant. Like he wasn’t there.” (Lysiak, 2013, p. 43)

Second, other aspects of his functioning are consistent with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. For example, he had an extreme sensitivity to lights and sounds, yet also had a marked decrease in sensitivity to pain (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014). Both of these conditions occur in schizophrenia (Torrey, 2006). He also had extremely rigid rituals or compulsions (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014), and though this could be seen simply as obsessive-compulsive disorder, such symptoms, particularly when they become markedly severe, can be based on delusions and can be an associated feature of schizophrenia (Torrey, 2006).

In addition, comments by the family members themselves struck me as significant. When Lanza was 14 years of age, he had several meetings with a nurse at the Yale Child Study Center: “During her conversations with him, he asked questions about schizophrenia and obsessive-compulsive disorder, but was unwilling to share if he was experiencing any of the symptoms of the disorders” (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014, p. 53).

The fact that Lanza was curious about schizophrenia and unwilling to disclose if he had any of the symptoms suggests the possibility that he had some of the symptoms but was unwilling to reveal this. Similarly, his mother wondered “whether her son had outgrown what had previously been diagnosed as borderline autism into something much more extreme” (Lysiak, 2013, p. 23). This was not necessarily schizophrenia, but it shows that his mother was not satisfied with the autism-spectrum diagnosis he had been given. After Lanza’s rampage, his father questioned the diagnosis of Asperger’s: “I was thinking it [the Asperger’s diagnosis] could mask schizophrenia” (Solomon, 2014).

Nearly two years after the attack, The Office of the Child Advocate in Connecticut released a report summarizing Lanza’s contacts with the medical and mental health systems. Though the report acknowledged that Lanza’s functioning “could suggest a possible psychotic break,” it concluded that “a review of emails authored by AL [Adam Lanza] through the last days of his life suggests that his thinking, while highly idiosyncratic and verging on the bizarre with regard to mass murder, was not actively psychotic” (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014, p. 105). This conclusion was preceded, however, by the comments that Lanza “would cope by withdrawing into a detached private inner world,” and that he had “fantasies that blurred the boundaries between inner experience and outer reality” (p. 104). Since psychosis is generally defined as a loss of touch with reality, the report suggests that Lanza was psychotic. The conclusion that he was not “actively psychotic” is followed a paragraph later by the comment: “It is possible that he increasingly lost touch with reality” (p. 105). Thus, though the report stopped short of concluding he was psychotic, it repeatedly described him as having lost touch with reality or suggesting that this was the case.

The most conclusive evidence of Lanza’s psychosis was not made public until 18 June 2015, when Reed Coleman wrote a blog post entitled “Exclusive: Private Messages Sent by the Sandy Hook Shooter” (Coleman, 2015c). Coleman had obtained two messages sent by Lanza to people he knew from the online forum in which he participated (the forum was originally known as “Super Columbine Massacre RPG,” but then was renamed “Shocked Beyond Belief”). The first of these messages is the relevant one in terms of Lanza’s psychosis. (Lanza’s writing is quoted as he wrote it without corrections for capitalization, punctuation, etc.)

Lanza wrote, “I have images of distorted faces flashing through my mind,” noting that “the faces are fairly mundane, and they sporadically rapidly appear without any context and then disappear” (Coleman, 2015c). Though he referred to them as mundane, they frightened him. He said, “I get slightly paranoid over them” and noted that afterwards he had to search his bedroom to make sure that no one was there. He referred to these as “hallucinations,” putting the word in quotation marks as if he weren’t sure if they were really hallucinations. He then went on to describe what apparently was his first significant psychotic episode:

> The incident was so surreal that I only remember a small amount of the details. Basically, I began to “see” many different things. Although I knew that none of it was actually real, it came as close to being real as it could be for me without it being physically tangible. I heard screaming around me, and I had an overwhelming sense that there was someone dead behind me. I kept seeing silhouettes of flickering people everywhere. I felt like I had to cry. The entire ordeal persisted for about 15 minutes and sort of faded away. Prior to it happening, I had never had that sort of delusional hysteria before. (Coleman, 2015c)

In this passage, Lanza recorded both auditory and visual hallucinations. His comment that he only remembered a little of the experience indicates that there was much more to it than he reported. His previous experiences of seeing faces that caused him to become paranoid apparently were the gradual onset of psychosis that culminated in a dramatic psychotic break. These psychotic symptoms, along with his poverty of speech, flattened affect, and the other factors discussed earlier, all support a diagnosis of schizophrenia.

Another detail is worth noting. Lanza wrote about his psychotic experience on 3 October 2010 (Coleman, 2015c). This was more than two years before his rampage. During the subsequent

two years, the frequency and severity of his symptoms may have increased. Though we don't know about the course of his psychosis, he became less functional over time in other domains. He withdrew from his family, stopped taking college classes, stopped posting on "Shocked Beyond Belief" (Coleman, 2014), and spent more and more time in the isolation of his home. By the time of his attack, he may well have been severely psychotic.

Why is the question of psychosis important? Because in trying to understand Lanza's rationale for the attack, we may be faced with an "irrational rationale." There have been shooters who gunned down girls who rejected them, teachers who failed them, principals who expelled them, and colleagues who denied them tenure. As abhorrent as such acts are, there were actual conflicts in which the perpetrators perceived themselves as victims of injustice and sought revenge. Revenge is a common rationale for violence.

In many cases, however, there was no real-life rationale. For example, at least one motivation for Seung Hui Cho's attack at Virginia Tech was to kill others before they killed him. His manifesto makes it clear that he saw himself not only as a victim of horrendous abuse and torture, but that he believed he was facing annihilation. This rationale was irrational (i.e., delusional). In seeking to make sense of Lanza's violence, we may be faced with one or more irrational rationales.

IDENTITY, HUMANITY, AND CIVILIZATION

Lanza had strong views of culture and civilization, and their relationship to human nature. How he viewed himself in terms of these concepts is important to understanding who he was.

To start with, Lanza apparently suffered severe emotional distress throughout his life. Evidence of his struggles occurred as early as elementary school, when he wrote "loser" and "ugly" on his hand (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014, p. 28). In fifth grade, he "did not think highly of himself and believed that everyone else in the world deserved more than he did" (Sedensky, 2013a, p. 33). When he was older and was "taking college courses, he often cried in frustration" and wondered why he was "such a loser" (Solomon, 2014). As a young adult, he described himself as "numbly perplexed over the foreign concept of loving life" (Coleman, 2014, p. 30), and stated, "I'm fine with the interminable depression that I normally have" (p. 33). According to his mother, he was "acutely aware that he was different from other kids" (p. 64).

Despite this awareness of his differentness and his own distress, his mother wrote, "He will not accept any preferential treatment at all ... He wants to believe that he is an ordinary student, and I think it is important to let him believe [this] for his self-esteem" (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014, p. 67). When asked to complete a form for a physician's office, Lanza "did not check off that he had any mental health issues" (p. 71).

It is interesting to see how Lanza integrated his life experiences and made sense of who he was, at times being painfully aware that he was different, yet at other times apparently trying to deny that there was anything wrong with him. To understand this process, we need to explore his view of human nature and culture.

In his view, growing up in a culture and learning how to function socially is a process of "raping" innocent minds. He stated: "The entire philosophy behind education: the brutal indoctrination of pristine minds so as to propagate some delusional system of cultural values" (Coleman, 2014, p. 32). He referred to "children who've been mindfucked by culturapists," viewing the imposition of culture onto children as a form of rape. He liked to take the word "therapist" and break it into "the rapist." For example: "Therapists are secular priests who assert that they have some 'truth', and if your values deviate, then you are 'wrong'. Hence, The Rapist. They impose their values onto you through their mindfucking" (Coleman, 2014, p. 16). He also referred to "the rape of civilization" (p. 29), meaning that the process of becoming civilized is a form of rape.

Though civilization certainly has its attendant ills, Lanza's views were extreme. This issue seemed like an obsession with him, as indicated by the frequency and intensity of his comments on the topic (the following quotes are all from Coleman, 2014).

> Culture. I've been pissed out of my mind all night thinking about it. I should have been born a chimp. (p. 29)
>
> Enculturing human children is already terrifying enough. (p. 29)
>
> I spent all day ruminating over how much I hate culture (p. 30)
>
> Gory shockumentaries are a joke compared to the terror of cultural indoctrination. (p. 30)
>
> I hate how I spend 99% of my time upset about culture. (p. 34)

Why was Lanza so obsessed with culture? He was profoundly anxious around people and never developed the social fluency that most children do. Growing up did not come naturally to him. The conventions that govern social interaction were foreign to him and he struggled when in the presence of other people. No wonder that he felt that socialization is a process of "submission" and "indoctrination." Included in his hostility toward culture was a disdain for language:

> I hate every facet of language. (Coleman, 2014, p. 30)
>
> [In response to the question "Where would you live?":] Any place and any time before language infected humans. (p. 30)

As a young child, he had difficulty learning to speak and made up his own "language," which he used at least until he was approximately five years old (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014, pp. 15–17). Rather than acquiring language with the ease of most

children, this, too, was a struggle. Thus, he objected to language as an imposition and longed to be able to live without it.

Lanza once wrote, "My wet dream is living in the wild with apes" (Coleman, 2014, p. 34). This is reminiscent of the lines from T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in which the title character comments, "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." The character suffered from paralyzing self-consciousness and an inability to engage socially. Lanza, like Prufrock, sought freedom from self-consciousness and social inadequacy by escaping into the wild as a non-human creature.

The concept of culture as a raping of innocent human nature is not only of significance to Lanza's own self-concept, but is also relevant to his view of mass murderers. The issue of society as the cause of violence was raised when someone posted the following message on the forum "Shocked Beyond Belief," of which Lanza was a frequent contributor:

> It is incredibly debatable whether or not societal factors had an effect or in some way influenced Columbine, and to be honest I think it wouldn't have made any difference if the high school was a utopia. I see it as two teenagers who were not well in any sense of the word acting for little to no reason whatsoever. Honestly the "society is shitty" commentary just seems a little much for me." (Coleman, 2014, p. 37)

This spurred Lanza to write a rebuttal of more than 600 words, arguing that mass murderers are symptomatic of the alienation caused by civilization. He argued:

> Civilization has not been present for 99% of the existence of hominids, and the only way that it's ever sustained is by indoctrinating each new child for years on end. The "wellness" that you speak of is solely defined by a child's submission to this process. (Coleman, 2014, p. 38)

Lanza concluded by referring to the other writer's admitted anxiety: "Do you really think that the way you feel is not symptomatic of anything other than your own inexplicable defectiveness?" (p. 38).

Lanza appears to have used a critique of civilization to address his own "inexplicable defectiveness." Throughout his life, Lanza was a misfit. By viewing his inability to function as a product of civilization and its resulting alienation, he could blame society for his problems. In this perspective, there was nothing inherently wrong with him — he was simply another young mind that was raped by cultural indoctrination. In fact, he was perhaps special in that he could see through this process and recognize culture for the horror that it is. In this light, perhaps he saw himself not as woefully inferior, but as intellectually superior to all those who mindlessly follow the dictates of civilization. His harsh cultural critique freed him for accepting his own "inexplicable defectiveness."

Lanza also used his cultural critique to explain mass murder. His long response about the connection between civilization, alienation, and violence argues that mass murderers are a product of a flawed society. Lanza commented about mass murder: "If you were trying to measure alienation in a society, what could be a more blatant indication?" (Coleman, 2014, p. 38). Viewing Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold (the Columbine killers) as innocent victims of a fragmented culture shifts the blame from them to civilization and all its evils. Thus, he could view his own murderous impulses not as a result of his own defectiveness, but as caused by the defectiveness of culture.

It is interesting that Eric Harris also objected to civilization and culture, but for completely different reasons than Lanza. Harris railed against morality and laws because they kept him from gratifying his desires: if he wanted to rape and kill, he thought he should be allowed to. He celebrated instincts over society's conventions, stating, "Laws delete instincts" (Langman, 2014b, p. 5). Thus, Harris objected to civilization because it got in his way. Lanza, however, objected to civilization because he couldn't function in it.

Whereas Lanza's posts on "Shocked Beyond Belief" focused on the alienation caused by civilization as the cause of mass murders, his posts on YouTube focused on mental illness as the cause of violence:

> When mental illness reaches the final point, this [a school shooting] happens. (Coleman, 2015a)

> Classic deluded psycho sitting in a room fantasizing. Not mind control. Just mental illness. (Coleman, 2015a)

> Psychology has proven that people who do things like this are mentally sick and not thinking 100% properly. (Coleman, 2015b)

> People who kill have many reasons and motivations, they are motivated by perverse urges which overcome them. They are sick in the head that is for sure, but they are not evil. (Coleman, 2015b)

At first, this might seem like a contradiction of his view that civilization causes violence, but in reality, the two views are essentially the same. According to Lanza, civilization causes psychological problems, the most extreme of which result in mass murder. In other words, culture causes mental illness, which in turn causes mass murder.

What remains obscure is how Lanza viewed himself. He wrote of his depression as well as suicidal thoughts: "I already kind of obsess over suicidal thoughts" (Coleman, 2015a). We also know he asked about the symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder and schizophrenia, but refused to answer questions about which of these symptoms he experienced. Did he view himself as mentally ill, and if so, with what diagnosis?

SEXUALITY

Whether or not Lanza's sexuality was connected to his rampage remains unclear. Regardless, sexuality appears to have been important to him, and yet like so many aspects of his identity,

it remains an elusive subject. In fact, even he didn't know what to make of it: "I'm pretty confused when it comes to my sexuality" (Coleman, 2015c). His comments regarding sexual identity and orientation are enigmatic. For example, he was asked to complete a form for Western Connecticut State University. For the item marked "Gender," Lanza wrote, "I choose not to answer" (Goldstein, 2013). Was he so shy that such questions seemed like an invasion of his privacy? Or was he perhaps not certain of his gender?

On 31 January 2011, Lanza posted this comment online: "I castrated myself when I was 15 to rebel against society" (Coleman, 2014, p. 6). What are we to make of this? Was it just a provocative comment? Or did he really castrate himself? Genital self-mutilation does occur and is associated with psychosis (Walsh, 2014). Lanza's autopsy report has not been made public, so we have no way of knowing if he really damaged himself or not. If he did, perhaps that would explain why he couldn't identify his own gender. If he didn't do it, why would he say that he did? Why would such a thought even occur to him unless he had serious issues regarding his sexuality?

Seven months later, on 6 September 2011, he wrote: "I used to think that I was asexual, but the primary reason why I thought that was because my BMI was 14" (Coleman, 2014, p. 13). Extremely low body weight might decrease one's libido, or perhaps low body weight was a convenient cover explanation for his reported asexuality. And yet, other comments suggest that he was not asexual. If not, what form did his sexuality take?

The official police report found evidence on his computer that he participated in an online "Discussion that focuses on gaming, homosexual fantasies, and day to day activities" (Sedensky, 2013b, p. A217). Lanza made comments online about his interest in a male member of the forum who posted under the name RegalSin, though these comments may have been jokes. For example, he wrote, "Say whatever you wish, but I know that my love for RegalSin is real" (Coleman, 2014, p. 18). He also wrote, "Gay marriage is legal in my state. I was holding out for RegalSin" (p. 19). This is not sufficient evidence to state that Lanza was homosexual, but it raises the possibility.

A more significant concern, however, is that of pedophilia. The police report on the Sandy Hook attack noted various materials on Lanza's computer related to pedophilia. These included a document "advocating pedophile's rights," a screenplay "describing a relationship between a 10-year-old boy and a 30-year-old man," a "profile of a pedophile," and a "movie depicting a man/boy relationship" (Sedensky, 2013b, pp. A215–A216).

The report by the Office of the Child Advocate noted that Lanza "crafted an undated and lengthy essay, which he identified as a college admission application text, outlining a position that pedophilia should not be considered abhorrent or illegal" (p. 101). Though Lanza stated that the length limit was 500 words, his essay was 34 pages long.

Among his online "buddies," Lanza (who posted under the name Smiggles) had the reputation of being a pedophile. One of them posted, "Doesn't anybody else notice that Smiggles sometimes sends huge 'I AM A PEDOPHILE' signals?" ("Shocked Beyond Belief: Complete Threads," p. 1,159). Lanza was aware of how he was perceived online and wrote the following:

> I don't think there should be any age of consent, but since no matter what I say everyone will accuse me of just wanting to justify some latent pedophilia I allegedly have, I will only say that you need to be attracted to prepubescents to be considered a pedophile. A 50-year-old who is attracted to pubescent 12-year-olds is not a pedophile; a 16-year-old who is attracted to 8-year-olds is a pedophile. (Coleman, 2014, p. 24)

This seems contradictory, with Lanza first saying there shouldn't be an age of consent, but then categorizing a teenager's interest in a pre-teen as pedophilia. The fact that he wrote a long essay defending pedophilia and had a document advocating for the rights of pedophiles suggests that he was attracted to children. Perhaps his online statement was an attempt to deflect criticism by modifying his position.

Coleman's recent revelation of two personal messages of Lanza's includes one that argues at length that there is nothing wrong with pedophilia. He ends, however, by stating that he has never had sexual contact with children, doesn't desire such contact, and is not a pedophile (Coleman, 2015c).

If Lanza was sexually attracted to children, would this have any bearing on his attack? Perhaps. After all, he didn't attack either college he had attended, or his former middle school or high school, or anywhere else in town. He deliberately sought out and killed young children. Perhaps he killed children out of sexual frustration, being attracted to them but unable to satisfy his desire for them. Perhaps he resented the power they had over him by stirring up feelings he could not express. In his personal message, he wrote, "the child has all of the control over the relationship" (Coleman, 2015c). This is a bizarre statement, and given his preoccupation with being a victim of society's control, his attack could have been a rebellion against children who "controlled" him by causing him to experience feelings he perhaps did not want or could not express.

Though there is no direct evidence to support this, Lanza did make a connection between sex and violence. He watched a safe-sex ad that involved "an animated drawing of a penis traveling around a bathroom (graffiti) wall looking for a mate, and getting rejected. At the very end, it puts on a condom and is welcomed by several drawings of vaginas" (Coleman, 2015b). Lanza thought the ending should have been different: "In reality, the penis at the end would get a gun and go on a rampage. No seriously" (Coleman, 2015b). In other words, in his mind, sexual frustration would lead to mass murder.

MILITARY ASPIRATIONS

Many school shooters had military aspirations that were thwarted (Langman, 2015). In some cases, they were rejected by the

military; in others, they were accepted but prematurely discharged; and in still others, they were prevented or dissuaded from even applying. The latter was the case with Lanza. As a young child, he dressed up for Halloween in a military costume. As a young adult, he told his mother that he wanted to enlist, but she talked him out of doing so, telling him he would "never be a marine" (Lysiak, 2013, p. 70). Lanza "took the news harder than even his mother expected" (p. 71). This apparently was a significant blow, though it did not end his interest in the military. In fact, "in the months leading up to the massacre, Lanza would dress himself up head to toe in a camouflage military uniform and target shoot with a pellet gun in his basement" (Lysiak and Schapiro, 2013). On the day of his attack, he was dressed in military clothes (Sedensky, 2013b, p. A180).

As discussed elsewhere (Langman, 2015), many shooters not only had military aspirations, but were also poor physical specimens. Their desire to be soldiers may have been an attempt to establish a sense of masculinity. This may have been the case with Lanza. He was six feet tall but only weighed 112 pounds — this is extraordinarily thin, perhaps emaciated (Sedensky, 2013a, p. 27). In addition, he had never been athletic and was said to walk with "a stiff, lumbering gait" that suggests poor coordination (Solomon, 2014). Lanza was a physically weak, socially stunted, and emotionally vulnerable young man. His desire to become a marine may have reflected his aspiration to become everything that he wasn't — strong, confident, and powerful. When Lanza created an online persona, "The skinny and frail teenager chose to create an imposing, bulky, muscle-bound soldier dressed in desert camouflage" (Lysiak, 2013, p. 56).

It is also noteworthy that Lanza actually seemed to think he could succeed in the military. Though this might not qualify as a delusion, it suggests how out of touch with reality he was. He was so timid that the woman who cut his hair for years was unaware that he was capable of speaking because she never heard him utter a word. His mother instructed people working at the house not to ring the doorbell because the noise would alarm or upset her son. He needed stability to such an extent that even during Hurricane Sandy, he refused to leave his house and go to a hotel, apparently because he could not tolerate a change in his routine (Sedensky, 2013a, p. 28). Keeping in mind what is required during military training, let alone actual military duty and combat experience, Lanza's apparent belief that he could succeed as a soldier seems bizarre.

RATIONALE FOR MURDER

There are several approaches to understanding Lanza's attack. First, we will consider why he might have felt the urge to commit murder in general. Then we will explore possible motives for specifically killing his mother and seeking out children as victims.

Why Kill at All?

Lanza was a physically weak and emotionally vulnerable young man who wanted very much to be a soldier. The idea of using firearms and violence to enhance one's sense of manhood or self-esteem was written about by Newman (2004) and Langman (2015), and can be seen in the writings of other school shooters. For example, Kimveer Gill (Dawson College) complained that society views jocks and preps as being above others; he referred to guns as "the great equalizer" ("Kimveer Gill Online," p. 15). Eric Harris (Columbine High School) wrote that having guns made him feel more confident and "god-like" (Langman, 2014a). After Elliot Rodger (University of California at Santa Barbara) obtained firearms, he wrote, "Who's the alpha male now?" (Rodger, 2014, p. 113). Perhaps Lanza also sought to experience power through acts of violence. Certainly, carrying guns into an elementary school made him a feared and formidable figure, which was a far cry from his usual timidity and his occasional terror about being in public. This may have been essentially an act of sadism, of having complete power over others, including the power to kill.

Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm wrote that the desire for absolute power "is the transformation of impotence into the experience of omnipotence" (1973, p. 290). Fromm went on to say of the sadistic character: "He is sadistic because he feels impotent, unalive, and powerless. He tries to compensate for this lack by having power over others, by transforming the worm he feels himself to be into a god" (p. 292).

Lanza had sunk to a state in which he was barely functioning. He was not in school and he didn't have a job. He had virtually no peer relationships — neither friends nor romantic partners. He was depressed and suicidal. He wished he were not human because he found human culture beyond his ability to deal with. The experience of profound inadequacy and powerlessness may have driven him to seek the experience of absolute power over others. The way to do this was through violence.

Did Lanza provide any insight into his action? Not directly, but he did post this comment on YouTube: "Violence usually occurs when something chaotic is happening and people are charged up or feel threatened, no matter how real or imagined that threat is" (Coleman, 2015b). To explore what he might have been charged up about or threatened by, we will consider the targets of his attack.

Rationale for Matricide?

Lanza's motivation for killing his mother is obscure. One possibility is that he conceived it essentially as a mercy-killing, preventing his mother from living with the horror of what he was about to do, from knowing that her son committed a massacre of children. There is no evidence to support this, however, and some of his writings suggest hostility toward his mother as well as women in general.

When Lanza was in fifth grade, he co-wrote a series of stories titled "The Big Book of Granny." In one of the stories, "Granny's Son shoots Granny in the head with a shotgun" (Sedensky, 2013b, p. A221). Ten years later, Lanza shot his own mother in the head. Was this a coincidence, or did he have long-standing matricidal thoughts?

In 2011, someone posted a sarcastic message online in response to something Lanza wrote. The other user wrote about having sex with Lanza's mother. Lanza responded with: "We will fuck her together! Then kill her and dispose of the corpse" (Coleman, 2015a). Coleman commented, "This would seem just an effort to elicit shock, except that within one year of this comment, Lanza would indeed claim his own mother as his first murder victim."

Lanza also wrote a document titled "Selfish," focused on "explaining why females are selfish" (Sedensky, 2013b, p. A218). The only woman he had long-term contact with was his mother. Was this an indictment of her? Lanza also expressed extremely hostile opinions about women and sexuality. For example, he wrote, "Fuckin women just use their pussy all day long, use it to get money, use it to get power" (Coleman, 2015b). Whether or not this comment had any relevance to his view of his mother remains unknown.

Why might Lanza have been hostile to his mother? There are multiple possibilities, among them that:

- She left him alone in the house for days at a time while she went traveling (Lysiak, 2013). Perhaps this seemed selfish to him.
- She was thinking of relocating to another state (Griffin and Kovner, 2013), which would have uprooted him. Given that he wouldn't leave his house to stay in a hotel even during a dangerous hurricane, the idea of moving to a new home in another state may have been terrifying.
- She reportedly volunteered with students at Sandy Hook Elementary School (Sedensky, 2013a, p. 30). He may have resented her spending time with other children.
- Perhaps he resented her for taking him to appointments with medical and mental health professionals; these were often very difficult for him (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014).
- She talked him out of enlisting in the military, thwarting his dream of becoming a marine (Lysiak, 2013).
- He viewed childrearing as a process of indoctrination and metaphorical rape; as the primary person who raised him, perhaps he viewed her as the most responsible for his being "mind-fucked."

Despite this list of possible reasons for killing his mother, we need to keep in mind that Lanza left no evidence to support any of them. In addition, it is possible that his motivation was based on a delusion, and was thus irrational.

Why Kill Children?

The factor that made Lanza's attack particularly heinous was that he gunned down young children. Why single them out? He could have attacked other schools or colleges he had attended, or picked any other location. Why target six-year-olds?

In the "Big Book of Granny" cited earlier, a character named Dora states, "I like hurting people ... especially children," and "Let's hurt children" (Sedensky, 2013b, p. A221). Though care has to be exercised in using fiction as a source for analysis, these quotes suggest that Lanza's homicidal thoughts toward children may have existed long before he actually decided to carry out an attack against them.

Reed Coleman noted the following about Lanza's posts on YouTube:

> [He] posted very frequently on the topics of war, violence, and firearms. Often, the subject of children would conspicuously be brought up in this context, associating children with guns and/or death. As previously noted, the views expressed by this user vary wildly on most subjects, and especially so on this topic, but the steady constant is his fixation on connecting children with destruction (2015b).

Here are a few examples of Lanza's preoccupation with the killing of children:

> [God] goes on multiple baby killing murder sprees. (Coleman, 2015b)
>
> They dropped White Phosphorus gas on fallujah and melted children alive in their beds from the inside out. That gas weapon is horrifying. I have seen all the dead children in Iraq. Lots. They shoot them daily. (Coleman, 2015b)
>
> Poor guy. He could be shooting children in Iraq instead. (Coleman, 2015b)

Lanza even had a "five-second video (dramatization) depicting children being shot" on his computer (Sedensky, 2013a, p. 26). Documenting his apparent fascination with killing children, however, does not explain this interest or shed light on why he personally chose to kill children.

In looking for a motivation, one might wonder if Lanza had been bullied at Sandy Hook Elementary School and conceived his attack as revenge. Even if this were the case, however, it hardly would constitute revenge to kill children who never harmed him and who had not even been born at the time that he attended the school. Thus, if Lanza viewed this as revenge, it was an irrational revenge.

Setting aside the question of how irrational this motive might have been, was Lanza bullied at Sandy Hook? After a thorough investigation, the Office of the Child Advocate concluded that "a history of bullying incidents is not supported by available documents" (2014, p. 72). For example, Mrs. Lanza's

e-mails indicated that Adam did well at Sandy Hook Elementary in first grade (p. 26). In addition, a later teacher "remembered no incidents of bullying or teasing, a common refrain from virtually all teachers or other former classmates of AL's" (p. 36). In addition, Lanza "indicated that he loved the school" (Sedensky, 2013a, p. 33), his family remembered his years there as "the best times of his life" (Lysiak, 2013, p. 36), and his father stated that "Adam loved Sandy Hook" (Solomon, 2014). Finally, Lanza left no records indicating hostility toward the school in general or toward any of his former classmates there. Based on the available evidence, there is no evidence that mistreatment by peers was a motivation for attacking his former elementary school.

Another possibility is that since his mother volunteered with children at the school, perhaps he resented them for taking her away from him to some extent. Her volunteering, however, had apparently not occurred for years, so this was not a current concern.

In other shootings, envy appears to have been a significant motivation (Langman, 2015). Knowing how difficult his childhood was, perhaps Lanza envied children in general because in his eyes they were all happy and would be successful, whereas he was depressed and a failure. He may have sought to obliterate children who represented social success and who thus highlighted the extent of his own "defectiveness."

As noted above, maybe he found children sexually attractive and his hostility toward them was rooted in his frustrated desire. Though he denied being a pedophile, his preoccupation with this issue, along with the impression he gave to his online community that he seemed to be a pedophile, make this a possibility.

Another alternative is that he might have been paranoid about children. His computer contained a file called "babies" that "contains two fictional writings of being attacked by babies and attempts to defend against them" (Sedensky, 2013b, p. A215). Perhaps Lanza had delusional beliefs that children were somehow a threat to him. If so, this would clearly be an irrational rationale.

Finally, perhaps he felt so weak and inadequate that he was afraid to attack teens or adults. Maybe he sought out the most vulnerable targets because that was all he felt capable of handling. After all, he could have attacked his former middle school, high school, college, or university, but he chose the elementary school. Even within this school, he did not go to a fifth grade classroom, but chose to kill first graders. If he sought the sadistic thrill of power as described by Fromm, perhaps the only place he felt confident of achieving this was in a room full of six-year-old children. After all, adolescents and adults might fight back, and in fact have done so in other school shootings. Lanza, with his meticulous research into mass murderers, presumably would have known this.

LANZA'S USERNAME: KAYNBRED

One of Lanza's online usernames was Kaynbred (Lysiak, 2013). The term "Kayn" may be significant, particularly since he identified a photograph of himself as a young child holding a gun as "kayn-tdler" (Sedensky, 2013b, p. A217). Perhaps Kaynbred meant that he saw himself as having been "bred" from Cain – the world's first murderer. Given Lanza's obsession with murderers, it would make sense for him to take the first murderer as a role model. Similarly, perhaps "kayn-tdler" meant Cain Toddler.

The story of Cain is of particular interest not only because Cain was a murderer, but because Lanza, like many other psychotic school shooters, had a sibling who was much higher functioning than he was (Langman, 2015). Unlike Lanza, his brother, Ryan, "was socially well adjusted, one of the popular kids at Newtown High" (Lysiak, 2013, p. 22). Sibling rivalry and sibling envy were issues for many psychotic shooters (Langman, 2015). Though Lanza left no record of animosity towards Ryan, he broke off contact with him two years before the attack, suggesting a hostile attitude. Thus, there may have been two reasons for Lanza to identify with Cain – sibling rivalry and murder.

14 DECEMBER

Was there any significance to the date Lanza picked for his attack? He left no indication of this, but 14 December 2012 was the 20th anniversary of the school shooting by Wayne Lo at Simon's Rock College. We know that Lanza was aware of this attack because he mentioned Lo in an online post, referring to "a string of school shootings which began increasing with Lu Gang [University of Iowa] and Wayne Lo in the early 1990s" (Coleman, 2014, p. 37). Lanza had compiled a spreadsheet that was 7-by-4 feet in size, and included data on 500 mass murders (Lysiak, 2013, p. 165). There is no known reason why Lanza might have identified with Wayne Lo more than any of the others, or chosen him as a model to emulate. Nonetheless, given the thoroughness of his research, he may well have been aware that he was carrying out his rampage on the anniversary of Lo's attack.

LANZA AS AN ABERRANT ADULT SHOOTER

Aberrant adult school shooters are those perpetrators over 18 years of age who attack schools that they have no current or recent connection to. They are distinguished from college shooters and secondary school shooters; the perpetrators in these categories have current or recent connections to the schools they attack (Langman, 2015). Virtually all aberrant adult shooters have been psychotic (Langman, 2015). Beyond their psychosis, their lives are usually notable for failures across multiple domains. This is true of Lanza. He had educational failures, he had no job or career, he had no significant other (nor had he ever been close to having one), and he failed in his military aspirations. He also had virtually no supportive family relationships; he hadn't spoken with his father or brother for two years and only communicated with his mother by e-mail, even

though they lived in the same house. Aberrant adult shooters often live isolated lives. Even so, the extent of Lanza's isolation was extreme.

His suicidal thoughts may have been a result of hopelessness about himself and what the future would hold for him. In addition, the magnitude of these failures and deficits may have caused envy and rage against those whom he perceived as succeeding where he had failed.

CONCLUSION

Adam Lanza remains an enigmatic figure, and his motivations for murder are elusive. He might have had paranoid delusions about children, envied them their social ease and perceived happiness, or been sexually attracted to them. He might have blamed his mother for indoctrinating him with culture, resented her behavior in one or more ways, or killed her for a reason that we cannot guess. Because he experienced psychotic symptoms, his motivation could have been based on a delusion or driven by voices commanding him to kill.

Despite the mystery of his motivation, he resembles other school shooters in his educational failures, lack of employment, failure to establish any intimate relationships, biological challenges to his masculinity, thwarted military aspirations, and the lack of any meaningful social connectedness. Though he is an enigma, he and his life fit many patterns observed among other perpetrators of rampage attacks.

Finally, as noted at the beginning of this article, Adam Lanza, Jared Loughner, James Holmes, and Elliot Rodger were all students in higher education shortly before committing mass murder. Based on my analyses, Lougher and Holmes were psychotic (Langman, 2015), and Rodger had both psychotic and psychopathic traits (Langman, 2014c). The frequency of psychotic shooters among college shooters and aberrant adult shooters is much higher than among secondary school shooters (Langman, 2015). Based on these findings, it is essential for personnel in higher education to be trained to recognize and intervene with students who are experiencing psychotic symptoms.

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